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911 Officials Warn that Older Phones May Cease Operating in 2022

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The Vermont Enhanced 911 Board joins the National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA) in issuing a notice to consumers that older phones may cease operating in early 2022 due to the retirement of 3G networks and support for phones using 3G service. This may include other devices that use 3G connectivity, such as some medical alert devices, tablets, smart watches, home security systems, and other devices.

“It is vitally important that the public be aware that national 3G networks will no longer work sometime early next year. These networks support older phones and devices that won’t work after the 3G network goes away” said Harriet Rennie-Brown, Executive Director of NASNA.

The nation’s three major wireless carriers (AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile) have each announced that they plan on discontinuing 3G service in favor of 4G (LTE) and 5G service next year. According to the FCC’s website, AT&T will discontinue service in February, T-Mobile/Sprint will discontinue service between March and July, and Verizon will discontinue service at the end of 2022.¹ Most users of these services will be notified directly by the carriers if this discontinuation affects them.

In Vermont and nationally, some community-based organizations have distributed older phones to clients since those phones could still be used to call 911 in an emergency. Once 3G service stops, those older 911-only phones may not work. Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Executive Director of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence said, “If you have an older phone that you use just for 911 purposes and do not have active service with a cell service provider, you will not be notified of the 3G network retirement. If you do not have a cell service provider and are unsure if your device will be impacted, you may be able to obtain additional information from the device settings or manufacturer.”

If you need help paying for your phone bill, consider applying for Lifeline. Under the federal Lifeline Program, low-income consumers may qualify for assistance with their monthly phone bill, broadband or bundled phone and broadband service. Additional information can be found at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>.

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¹ See <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/plan-ahead-phase-out-3g-cellular-networks-and-service>